

# Prevent Infant and Toddler Tooth Decay or Early Childhood Caries (ECC)



## Oral Health Program

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## What is Early Childhood Caries (ECC)?

ECC is severe decay in the baby teeth of infants and young children. Frequent exposure to liquids that contain sugars leads to tooth decay. Bacteria in the mouth use the sugars to produce acids, which attack the teeth and cause the teeth to decay.



## Your child may develop ECC if they

- Go to bed with a bottle filled with milk, formula, juice or a sweetened drink.
- Sleep all night at the breast.
- Drink from a bottle or sippy cup throughout the day.
- Use a pacifier dipped in sugar, honey or other sweet item.
- Eat from the same spoon as other people.

## What causes Early Childhood Caries?

- Germs passed from one person's mouth to another.
- Liquids that contain sugar that are left in baby's mouth for a long time. Even breast milk and formula contain sugar.

## Strong, Healthy Baby teeth are important!

When teeth are decayed, a child may suffer pain, eating and speech problems, and a poor self-image. If baby teeth are lost too early, the permanent teeth come in crowded or out of line.

## Start Early to Protect Your Child's Teeth

- Put your child to bed without a bottle or sippy cup. Offer a blanket, stuffed animal or toy instead. If your baby must have a bottle to sleep, fill it with plain water only. You may need to water down the bottle contents little by little until just water is offered.
- Don't let your baby sleep all night at the breast.
- At about six months of age, begin teaching your child to drink from a cup. Serve juice from a cup, not a bottle or sippy cup.
- Don't let others put anything that goes in baby's mouth in their mouth (spoon, pacifier, toys, or nipple, etc).
- Wean your baby from the bottle by one year of age.
- Avoid soda pop and other sweet drinks.
- Don't let your child drink from a bottle all day long. Hold your child while feeding or have them sit in a high chair or at the table while eating or drinking.
- Clean your child's teeth and gums with a clean washcloth or a small, soft toothbrush after eating and before bedtime.
- Take your child to the dentist by one year of age.

